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ABSTRACT

A reprint of a 1975 article on multi-sensory exercises for communicative second language learning is presented. The article begins by noting that the use of drills as a language learning and practice technique had been lost in the trend toward communicative language teaching, but that drills can provide a means of gaining functional control of linguistic units. Attempts to replace superficial drills with drills for communicative intent are outlined, and the Audio-Motor Unit, a strategy with a unique combination of elements, is described. The unit involves a series of commands on a central theme, presented orally and acted out by the teacher for students to listen to and observe. Later, students are asked to join the motor activity as commands are repeated, capitalizing on the combined learning effects of sound, sight, and physical movement. The commands can then be used as a basis for extensive oral pattern practice of new or review material. The method both is effective and holds student attention. It is also possible to extend its use by adding writing activities or other reinforcers such as touch, taste, and smell. Examples of classroom interactions are given in several languages. (MSE)

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MULTI-SENSORY EXERCISES: AN APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE

(Reprinted from Dimension: 1975)

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During the 1950's and 60's drills as a learning and practice technique dominated the language scene. The concept fit into the philosophy of the time which stressed formation of new and automatic language habits. The present decade brought a new emphasis. Tired of tedious repetitions, substitutions, and transformations which were made without thought for the messages behind them, the profession underscored the importance of meaningfulness--a quality which is realized when learners feel they are really communicating something of value to them.

The idea of practicing with drills has been almost lost in this new communication trend. The present direction is to let the learner say what is meaningful to him--a powerful motivational force, but a rather quixotic dream when not tempered with the reality of laying a foundation of basic structural competence. There is no easy way to learn foreign languages. A student either comes to grips with learning structural and syntactic elements or he does not learn to communicate, unless he is to be content with a Tarzan-type system ("Me Tarzan, you Jane").

What can realistically be expected of a student left to his own devices for language practice? Chances are he will be hard pressed to come up with ways to use what he has studied cognitively. He needs help, and he looks to the instructor to provide some context for going beyond the analysis stage of language learning. What kind of context must it be? Certainly it cannot replicate that of the artificial and boredom-producing drills of the fifties and sixties. Somehow it must be meaningful and

communicative and at the same time be structured sufficiently to give practice toward functional command of basic grammatical components.

I shall pursue this quest in this paper, first by presenting a brief review of the communicative status of drills, and second by sharing a technique which may hold the promise of bringing drill activity closer to communication than perhaps it ever has been.

My first step is to make a plea for moderation. It is tempting to give ourselves to every new idea or trend that comes along, our enthusiastic support of which often causes us to deny or at least to forget the wisdom gained from accumulated learning of the past. Applying the concept of moderation to practicing the foreign language in the classroom, I suggest we hold up the caution sign to those who, in their zeal for communication, would have us alienate ourselves from anything reminiscent of drill practice. We rightly confess the limitations of the drill era of past decades, but likewise we can attribute to it certain strengths.

Although drills are characteristically mechanical in nature and have suffered extensive abuse, they provide a means of gaining functional control of linguistic units which otherwise might not be acquired. Illustrative of this point are the repetition drill and the substitution drill. The former is often done in pronunciation practice aimed at refining production of certain sounds. Emphasis here is on articulation, and no pretense is made to hide its mechanical nature. The substitution drill can be carried out with structural or lexical changes to develop automatic use of linguistic units in varied contexts. Although some teachers undoubtedly use this type of drill on a purely mechanical level, probably most recognize its potentially damaging effect on student interest, and in one way or another, attempt to get students to think about what they are saying during the exercise. This is done easily with nouns. Wilkins¹ points out how in the stimulus--"I'm looking for the watch."--the noun can be cued with a picture or, better yet, with the object itself. Teachers with a good understanding of "audiolingualism" enhanced their drill work with this kind of visual impact. They likewise brought in meaningfulness with other elements too, for one need not stop with nouns but can deal meaningfully with verbs as well. It is true that verbs are often of an abstract nature (for example, hope, feel, want) whose meaning is hard to define thorough visual aids. When no other recourse exists on such items, a rapid-fire translation may prove of value. But in many situations (for

example, "I'm looking for the watch.") students' memory on the meaning of the verb can be jogged through dramatization, if the instructor can cope with a certain amount of clownish behavior without feeling foolish in front of his students.

Professional literature has its recommendations and descriptions of drills which are supposed to make language practice more meaningful and hence more palatable to students. Many of the attempts, however, tend to share a common feature of superficiality of intent, for it is obvious that as they are conducted, the instructor is not really interested in the responses for the sake of their message, but rather for language practice itself. Such a tendency is often seen in question answer practice; for example, "Are you cold?" or "Do you like to go to the beach?" Although such questions conceivably could arise out of situations which elicit sincere concern on the part of the instructor toward the student's state of feelings, they are generally intended for mere practice of structural forms. We can expect the student to be rather bored with the whole activity because, as Rivers says, he "... is not communicating anything that is of real import to him nor receiving any genuine message."²

A drill which comes somewhat closer to reality is one called the communication drill.³ Here, according to Paulston, "The student has free choice of answer, and the criterion of selection here is his own opinion of the real world--whatever he wants to say." The question "What did you have for breakfast?" for example, although likely to elicit a reply about food, still gives the learner a choice of foods, but furthermore allows the possibility of an answer like "I overslept and skipped breakfast so I wouldn't miss the bus." Students must be instructed to answer truthfully to make this kind of drill successful. It is obviously a drill for more advanced students.

Another attempt toward communication with drill is made by Palmer, in which a hypothetical situation is established for student response. He suggests, for example, that students be presented with the following stimulus: "Karen, if you and Susan came to class at 8 a.m. and it was winter and the room was dark at 8 a.m., what would you tell Susan?"⁴ Although this drill may have merit with foreign students learning English and perhaps with learners of some other languages, it unfortunately has shortcomings with a language like Spanish. In eliciting the answer--"I would tell Susan to turn on the light"--it is limited for use with advanced students having studied the conditional tense

and the past subjunctive. But more serious is that, like so many other drill approaches intended for meaningful practice, it has no built-in indicators to insure that students will understand the meaning of the various language elements contained in the stimulus. The idea of understanding the stimulus is a most important point, for no student can proceed with the problem to be practiced when he is confused over the elements of the very first step.

We are faced, therefore, with the task of finding a type of drill which applies to any level of a language and which at the same time stimulates and maintains student interest as well as makes the meaning of the units being drilled crystal clear. A strategy believed to provide the foundation for a drill with this unique combination of elements is the Audio-Motor Unit--a technique designed initially for developing listening comprehension⁵ and later extended successfully to the teaching of culture.⁶ Further use of the Audio-Motor Unit at the University of Georgia has shown its promise as an important means for conducting meaningful drill.

The Audio-Motor Unit basically involves a series of commands on a central theme which is presented orally and acted out by the teacher for students to listen to and observe. Later, students are asked to join in the motor activity as they hear the commands. These steps capitalize on the combined effect of learning through sound, sight and physical movement. To give all members of this multi-language audience an opportunity to see the pedagogical possibilities of this technique, I shall give a number of commands in an imaginary language and act them out. I shall ask you to associate the oral utterances with the motor activity toward the end of being able to respond physically yourselves when you hear the cues.

kufasa munaki	(Raise your arms.)
kifoka zani	(Extend them sideways.)
kifoka ná	(Extend them backwards.)
kifoka sú	(Extend them forward.)
petu manafa	(Move your finger.)
kumana munaki	(Lower your arms.)

Now listen and observe again. (Above repeated.) Now join with me in the actions this third time as you hear the commands. (Above repeated.) To test what you have learned, now obey a fourth repetition of the commands without my model movements for imitation.

As you can see, comprehension of the strange sounds of a new language quickly takes place, because the meanings behind the sounds are obvious through motor response. The combination of sight, sound and motor activity seems to facilitate learning. A caution in using this strategy, which I am sure you have recognized through participation in the exercise, is to mix up the commands in subsequent practice sessions; otherwise, students tend to memorize the sequence of actions without regard for the sounds, which action is of course alien to our purpose.

Recognizing the possibility that the sample unit shown may be held by some to be too bizarre or infantile for use with their particular level of students, I call your attention to the fact that units can be designed on any number of themes, many of which fit in nicely with the classroom environment. For example:

EnglishSpanish

Pick up the book.
Wipe off the cover.
Open the book.
Put your finger on
the page.

Coge el libro.
Limpia la tapa.
Abre el libro.
Pon el dedo en la
página.

Put it at the top of
the page
At the bottom of the
page.

Ponlo arriba en la
página.
Al pie de la página.

Go to the front of
the book.

Anda al principio del
libro.

Go to the back of
the book.

Anda al final del
libro.

Go to the middle of
the book.

Anda al medio del
libro.

Slam it shut.

Círralo de golpe.

So far we have dealt only with listening comprehension. A logical continuation is to use the Audio-Motor Unit as a foundation for speaking activity. Any one of the commands can serve as a base for extensive pattern practice either in terms of new learning or review. When the instructor utters and then acts out "Pick up the book," for example, he can provide speaking practice with both subject and verb form changes as illustrated through the following:

- Instructor: Pick up the book, John.
What are you doing?
- John: I'm picking up the book.
- Instructor: What is John doing, Mary?
- Mary: He's picking up the book.
- Instructor: I'm picking up the book, too.
What are you and I doing, John?
- John: We're picking up the books.
- Instructor: Pick up the books, John and Mary.
What are they doing, Joe?
- Joe: They're picking up the books.

What has been done so far is to pull out a command learned in its Audio-Motor Unit context and to add a fourth reinforcing element--speaking--to the already experienced modalities of sight, sound and motor activity. A highly communicative drill is established through the instructor's questions followed by student understanding of the element being practiced (to pick up) through motor responses.

Without straining communication, the same questions can also be asked in the context of other tenses and modes. If we were dealing with Spanish, for example, we would find it appropriate to practice the following tenses: present (cojo), present progressive (estoy cogiendo), past progressive (estaba cogiendo), imperfect (cogía), preterite (cogi), present perfect (he cogido), and past perfect (había cogido). Even future tense can be practiced when the following kind of cue is given: "Tomorrow you'll pick up the book, John. Show me and tell me what you'll do tomorrow." Speaking practice in the imperative mode can also be provided (for example, "John, tell Mary to pick up the book").

Of course, certain stock questions with their appropriate verb forms (for example, "What are you doing?," "What did you do?," etc.) will have to be memorized first. But once these are learned, a whole new area of communication activity is opened up.

So far, a considerable amount of interesting practice has been done with one verb only. Other forms can also be extracted from the commands and practiced within their motor contexts. "Wipe off the book," "Put your finger on the top of the page," "Go to the back of the book," etc. provide even further structural and syntactic practice.

Situation is limited only to the extent of the instructor's imagination in designing Audio-Motor Units around which drills are

built. Commands requiring students to respond physically and then to talk about the response can produce highly interesting and even hilarious situations which, of course, not only provide talk with understanding but which also hold the attention of the entire class.

This approach to language practice is not entirely new. Drills presented by means of sequential situations were recommended by Gouin⁷ in the nineteenth century as well as by Jespersen⁸ back in 1904. In more recent times, Oller and Obrecht⁹ conducted an experiment on what they termed "informational sequence" which supported learning through a sequential situation approach. Schumann¹⁰ likewise argued for its use as he described the "Situational Reinforcement" technique of the Institute of Modern Languages in Washington, D.C. Paralleling the Audio-motor Unit idea in many respects, "Situational Reinforcement" has grown into a method for which materials are being produced commercially.¹¹ Like other drills, however, it contrasts significantly in its assumption that students will understand the stimulus (for example, "Juan, do you have any change?")¹² on the basis of previous learning. The Audio-Motor based drill, on the other hand, ensures meaning as it combines an oral command with physical action on the part of the teacher for all to see and then to be reinforced by motor response. A limitation, of course, is that it can deal only with verbs whose meaning can be acted out. There are hundreds of verbs, however, that fall into this category and which furthermore can be learned in a variety of structural contexts. The Audio-Motor based drill, then, holds promise for a great deal of effective practice in the classroom.

Up to now I have discussed meaningful drill practice in the context of hearing, seeing, motor response and speaking. A fifth reinforcing agent--writing--might also be added, but it would present some problems for the students in its irregularities in orthography. Other reinforcers may be more practical. The senses of touch, taste, sound and smell, for example, seem to present a means of extending even further the idea of multi-sensory exercises. Consider the following English-Spanish Audio-Motor Unit.

Pick up the bottle of wine.
Coge la botella de vino.

Run your fingers over the bottle.
Pasa los dedos por la botella.

It's smooth.
Es lisa.

Touch the neck of the bottle.
Toca el pico de la botella.

Touch the fat part.
Toca la parte de abajo.

Touch the cork. It's dry, isn't it?
Toca el corcho. Está seco, ¿verdad?

Squeeze it. It's spongy.
Apriétalo. Parece esponjoso.

Throw it up in the air.
Tíralo al aire.

It's light.
Es liviano.

Smell the wine.
Huele el vino.

Take out your handkerchief.
Saca tu pañuelo.

Pour a little wine on it.
Moja el pañuelo con el vino.

Feel the wet part.
Toca la parte mojada.

Pick up a glass and the bottle.
Coge un vaso y la botella.

Clink the bottle and the glass.
Suenan la botella con el vaso.

Listen to the clink.
Escucha el sonido.

Pour a little wine.
Sírvele un vaso de vino.

Taste it.
Pruébalo.

How sour! Make a face.
¡Qué agrio! Haz una mueca.

Pound the bottle against the table
Golpea la botella contra la mesa.

Listen to the loud sound.
Escucha el sonido que hace.
Es alto, ¿verdad?

Pound the bottle against your hand.
Golpea la botella contra la mano.

Listen to the thud.
Escucha el sonido que hace.
Es bajo, ¿verdad?

A quick analysis of this unit shows its construction to be centered around four additional sensory perceptions: (1) touch (for example, "Run your fingers over the bottle. It's smooth."); (2) taste (for example, "Taste it. It's sour."); (3) sound (for example, "Listen to the clink."); and, (4) smell (for example, "Smell the wine."). Accompanying the already built-in reinforcers of the basic Audio-Motor Unit (hearing, seeing and motor activity), the additional senses of touch, taste, sound and smell all combine to create a practice exercise replete with meaningfulness. Insertion of speaking practice extends the usefulness of the exercise even more.

As a final part of this discussion, I will make a few comments about testing procedures with multi-sensory exercises. I will limit my remarks to paper and pencil tests in a group setting, an approach which I see as decidedly inferior to face-to-face testing

of individual students, but which is more practical in terms of time required for administration.

The listening portion of an Audio-Motor Unit can easily be tested by translation of the foreign language commands to English. Although translation holds the disadvantage of forcing the student to switch from one linguistic system to another, it takes advantage of the native language to determine quite precisely the extent of listening comprehension skill. Its strength lies in its requirement for active production on the part of the student rather than for selection of multiple choice items which is mere recognition or passive knowledge.

Going beyond listening comprehension, students can be asked to respond in writing in the foreign language as the instructor utters an oral command followed by a question eliciting description of the related motor activity; for example, Instructor's oral command: Pick up the bottle of wine. Instructor's oral question: What am I doing?

Student's written reply: You're picking up the bottle of wine. The second approach is similar to the first except that in place of the oral command the instructor acts it out. Students associate the language they learned which accompanies the motor activity, and in the foreign language they write what the instructor is doing. Of course, as with the actual drill sessions used for learning the language forms, tense changes ("What did I do?," "What have I done?," etc.) as well as pronoun changes are employed for testing.

In conclusion, I think it is fair to admit that there is an element of quixotism in all this talk about communication in the foreign language classroom unless we are talking about teachers who have a good deal of language proficiency themselves. Perhaps this is the reason why some, recognizing their limitations, resort to teaching merely the forms of the language. Gaarder¹³ suggests aiding them by furnishing a manual which contains the language needed for the communicative venture. This may be useful, but it cannot help but fail to provide all the language, especially that which so often must occur spontaneously. What is needed is a personal command of the language of common everyday speech, which is difficult to acquire except through extensive linguistic contact with native speakers. Some teachers may be fortunate to have this opportunity available to them in their own communities, while others, at considerable sacrifice, may have to seek it out elsewhere, even to the point of taking up

periodic residence abroad. The important point is that some kind of continual growth in competence with the foreign language be experienced by all of us. Through our design of multi-sensory exercises we will undoubtedly be confronted by our inadequacies with common everyday forms of our second language. We talk easily about lessons in the textbook, but can we handle the myriads of other situations that make up ordinary speech? As we attempt to write meaningful exercises for use in our classrooms we will undoubtedly falter at one time or another. But here is where contact with native speakers will avail us in both design of materials and increase in personal language proficiency.

Teaching for communication calls for a supportive relationship between communicative techniques and teacher competence in the language. I believe we must be continually concerned with both elements, for without them, it will be difficult to make our foreign language teaching really very exciting and meaningful.

NOTES

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